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ABSTRACT

Views on the 1985 Association of American Colleges' (AAC) report, "Integrity in the College Curriculum," are presented based on lessons from the Greeks and specifically the period 450 to 350 B.C.E. Seven inferences are made on what an Athenian might offer in response to the AAC Report. For the Greeks, the goal of education was wisdom and the development of character. Greek thinkers might find fault with the AAC Report for not emphasizing the link between virtue (values) and responsibility to society. They might view the present curriculum as focused too much on individualism, personal gain, and careerism. Memorization of facts and formulas does not produce knowledge, according to the Greeks, who valued reasoning and the art of critical thinking. They would probably reject the notion that critical thinking could be taught or learned when separated from literacy. Other recommendations congruous with Greek ideals include: formal education should not be isolated or disengaged from society; instruction, when grounded in exploration of real issues, gives rise to a shared experience that can be defined as the culture of society; adherence to a traditional and formalized curriculum should be avoided; and successful acquisition of wisdom comes through evocative styles of teaching. (SW)

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A VIEW FROM THE PORTICO:

LESSONS FROM THE GREEKS

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Saint Louis University

ASHE Annual Meeting

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A VIEW FROM THE PORTICO:

LESSONS FROM THE GREEKS

My contribution to this panel is a responce to the AAC Report: INTEGRITY IN THE COLLEGE CURRICULUM from the perspective of Classical Antiquity. My primary point of reference will be the "pedagogical century" -- 450 to 350 B.C.E. during which the foundations of Western higher education were laid in the bedrock of Athens, chief city of the Delian League and intellectual fountain of Hellenism.

Campus speakers cite the Greeks in defense of their favorite curriculums, particularly various approaches to liberal education and the Liberal Arts. But such notions have little basis in historical fact. A common "liberating" curriculum was an invention of the Roman orators in the first centuries of the Christian era. How then did the Hellenes pursue the higher learning? And what wisdom can we draw from them?

We attribute much educational wisdom and tradition to the Hellenes, particularly those from Attica, and I believe much of that has been misinterpreted and has led to erroneous notions about the aims and content of liberal education. Material on Greek education looms monumentally

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in Western culture. I began by rereading the works of the most noted educators from that era-- Plato and his rival Isocrates --augmented by the definitive critical work on Greek education, Paideia by Werner Jaeger. Deciding not to give a review of Hellenic education, I attempted to place myself in the sandals of a concerned citizen of 4th century Athens, not one totally committed to any of the three major schools of thought on the subject-- the Sophists, the Philosophers, and the Rhetoricians--but someone who would draw value from each.

Plato and Isocrates offer our best view of the curricular debate of the Hellenic world. They would find the AAC Report a worthy foil against which to advance their own views on education. They would criticize it, I think, for its lack of basic definitions and any forceful statement of aims. It looks anemic when compared to their straight forward and sanguine phrases. While concurring somewhat with statements in the Report about instruction, they would be confused by the implied division of knowledge into disciplines and the assumed aloof and arrogant role of faculty members.

I approached my task by asking what a citizen of 4th century Athens could offer to a 20th century American that would enhance and clarify the latter's views of collegiate programs. I collapsed my thoughts into seven statements (a

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propitious number in Neoplatonic circles of the Hellenistic world, since phenomena in the cosmos naturally were assumed to occur in categories of seven. Pythagoras would be proud!). Using them as a basis for my reflections, I inferred what an Athenian might offer in responce to the AAC Report, albeit briefly.

One. THE GOAL OF EDUCATION IS THE ACQUISITION OF ARETE, THE GREEK TERM FOR VIRTUE, EQUATED WITH WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE.

In our time we would refer to this as character development, or in psychological terms as the maturing of a healthy personality. For the Greeks the terms knowledge, virtue and wisdom encompased the same phenomena. As a contemporary concept we might think of arete in Maslovian terms as "self-actualization," or the empowerment of a fully functioning person in society.

While all three schools would acknowledge that arete was the chief goal of the higher learning, they would differ as to how young men acquired wisdom. Initially the philosophers argued that wisdom was an innate quality that could only emerge through living an examined life. Plato presented this argument in his dialogue "Protagorous." He further explored this question in his subsequent dialogues on education, "Gorgias" and "Meno". In "Meno" he concludes

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that virtue, though having innate qualities, could be taught and learned through the process of philosophy, primarily dialectic.

The Sophists staked their professional reputations on their declaration that, indeed, arete could be taught through formal studies, involving memorization and structured exercises. They were the first professional teachers; they charged a fee for their services, a practice abhored by Socrates. Isocrates nailed down the middle ground. For him arete could be achieved through formal exercises, practice, and reasoning.

All three schools would affirm that virtue is grounded in social responsibility. Wisdom was exercized to benefit community and not to promote individualistic or selfish gains.

And how might they respond to the AAC Report? I think they would fault it for not emphasizing the link between virtue (values) and responsibility to society. They might view our curriculum as focused too much on individualism, personal gain, and careerism. Both Plato and Isocrates denounced the Sophists for stressing these same goals in their educational system, that is, the acquisition of the techniques of rhetoric in order to gain public office and greater material goods.

Plato and Isocrates would call for bold statements on virtue and the responsibility of citizenship. They would find the overall thrust of the AAC Report as rather weak and vacillating on this major goal of the higher learning. They might, however, agree with the Report that allowing academicians (in their eyes, the Sophists) to determine the aims of education based on popular demand for career skills leads to a superficial, amoral education with eventual weakening of both civic virtue and the state.

By Hellenic standards the Report probably places too great a stress on intellectual achievements. The Athenians would be more confortable with the pronouncements on education by Sanford, Perry, Chickering et al who view a differentiated and integrated ego as the end result of the higher learning.

Two. MEMORIZATION OF FACTS AND FORMULAS DOES NOT PRODUCE KNOWLEDGE, IN THE GREEK SENSE, ARETE.

Both Plato and Isocrates derogated the Sophist's method of education that relied greatly on the memorization of facts and formulas. They argued that specialized data unrelated to virtue might generate more mischief than enlightened behavior. They particularly accused the Sophists of false claims in even alluding to the promise that such a course of study would lead directly to the

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aquisition of virtue. For the philosophers this was a simple case of lack of truth in advertising. PR Departments take note.

In the Greek mind all knowledge was interrelated and harmonious. It could not be fragmented and studied separately. The truly educated person in the Greek world was termed a polymath--knowledgable in all things. Reasoning was valued more than the recitation of facts. Even natural phenomena and mathematics combined qualitative as well as quantitative elements, the understanding of which led to a greater appreciation of the universe and the ability to make wise decisions in a broad context. The Hellenes would perceive specialization as an aberration akin to exercizing just one part of the body. Wisdom and knowledge existed in unity throughout the universe, thus they would have rejected a reductionist approach in forming the curriculum.

In general, I think, the Athenian educators would approve of the Report's emphasis on "how to learn" rather than "what to learn." They would also appreciate the notion that science should be learned as a process rather than a system of laws and data.

Three. THE WAY TO ACHIEVE ARETE (VIRTUE) LIES IN EXERCISING THE ART OF CRITICAL THINKING.

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The individual who posses arete manifests that quality by making right and virtuous decisions. All three major school in Athens would accept that statement, although they would part company on instructional methods. Basically, all schools viewed every learner as an investigator. They rejected the notion that pat answers existed for any question and assumed that the pursuit of knowledge involved the intellect's attempt to discover answers for specific circumstances. The prerequisite information needed to pursue the answers did not lie in isolated facts (data, if you will) but in general concepts about human behavior and natural phenomena. Two major methods of exploration vied for dominance in Hellenic higher education--dialectic and rhetoric.

The philosophers relied heavily on dialectic, a rigorous and disciplined approach that analyzed opposing or conflicting statements synthesizing common elements of truth from each. In its most honored form it cast aside superficial and irrelevant statements in search for the essence of truth in its most general terms.

Its competitor for the Athenian mind was rhetoric, a means of reasoned inquiry employing common sense, logic and analogy to derive pragmatic answers. Rhetoric relied heavily on intuition, that spark of creativity that would emerge after a rigorous process of examining all the related

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information surrounding an issue. To us it would be something like Gestalt psychology or insight. We see this same concept explained by Bruner as "effective surprise," when supposedly unrelated objects suddenly come together for us in a new pattern, and we perceive relationships in new and exciting ways. The rhetorical method seemed a more practical, common sense approach to the process of attaining arete and, indeed, it won the day in the Hellenic and Hellenistic world. Despite the opinion held by many contemporary academicians that Plato educated most of Athenian youth and set the pattern for higher education with the founding of the Academy, Isocrates and the rhetorical school dominate the educational scene from 4th century B.C.E. to the present.

In general, I feel that the Athenians would accept the emphasis given to both critical thinking and literacy in the Report, while allowing that neither topic is explained very well nor in the depth required to give much guidance to faculty or administrators. Nor do I believe the Greeks would accept the notion that critical thinking could be taught or learned when separated from literacy.

Four. FORMAL EDUCATION OUGHT NOT BE ISOLATED OR DISENGAGED FROM SOCIETY.

In the Hellenic world the events of the day provided the content of instruction. We misinterpret Plato when we speak of learning for learning's sake or knowledge for knowledge's sake. For him, and his contemporaries, virtue and knowledge existed only in the world in which they resided. The Greek "ideas" that we sometimes view as being too abstract and impractical provided them useful generalizations that facilitated thinking about complicated matters in more manageable patterns--not unlke Bruner's view of structures. Those "ideas", (we would call them constucts) yielded categories that allowed them to thrust aside superficiality and irrelevancies and pierce to the heart of a matter. Hellenic teachers willingly took their intellectual wares to the marketplace and engaged in open debate. They did not perceive the agora as enemy territory, inhabited by Philistines; rather they viewed it as the locus of education.

It would occur to Athenians that the Report does not address contemporary reality in the curriculum. It seems to champion the literary over the experiential. While it hints at a pedagogy of learning to think, it does not suggest the kind of issues that ought to facilitate critical thinking about life today. The Hellenic view would favor a problem oriented approach-- not the Great Books (much less textbooks), but the Great Issues.

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The Report seems to decry the influence of the marketplace and its impact on professors and the curriculum instead of embracing that reality and suggesting ways to accomodate both the needs of the academy and those of society. The Report appears elitist in restiricting its comments to traditional disciplines and inhospitable towards new paradigms of knowledge. It perpetuates the distinction between general education and career training -- an attitude that would puzzle the Athenians who considered all knowledge part of the whole, involving the same intellectual faculties used in the pursuit of knowledge for citizenship as well as for a life's work. The Greeks, I think, would fault the Report for not forcefully declaring that the aim of education is the development of the virtuous citizen-- an individual who contributes to all facets of society: economic, governmental, and cultural.

Five. INSTRUCTION WHEN GROUNDED IN EXPLORATION OF REAL ISSUES GIVES RISE TO A SHARED EXPERIENCE THAT CAN BE DEFINED AS THE CULTURE OF SOCIETY.

For the Hellenes the subject matter of a common curriculum emerged from life itself in all its varieties and complexities. Culture for them included values, laws, institutions, traditions, conventions, language, tools, artifacts, games -- all those things which formed a common experience in day to day life. For them, a common

curriculum was not what a few people judged it to be, but rather life itself.

The term for common education used by the Greeks was "enkuklios paideia", which implied an all encompassing treatment of experience. Initially, the Sophists articulated the concept of an ethnic culture and recognized the importance of transmitting it to the next generation. They recognized that culture provided the cement that bound people together and in its absence society would disintegrate and fall prey to outside forces. Plato and Isocrates maintained that education (enkuklios paideia) ought to foster critical thinking that would enable individuals to evaluate, criticize, and imrove upon the elements of their culture.

The Athenian educator would probably question the Report's implied acceptance of specific disciplines and the highlighting of several for special attention. They might argue, also, with the tack of having a preconceived notion of what constitutes a liberal education rather than allowing it to take form as the needs of society dictate. They would probably plead for a more flexible, less elitist approach in judging the value of subject areas. They would relishj a clear declaration of what culture is, or is not, today, not what it ought to be.

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Six. SLAVISH ADHERENCE TO A TRADITIONAL AND FORMALIZED CURRICULUM CAN VITIATE THE ACQUISITION OF VIRTUE AND LEAD TO IRRELEVANCY.

History teaches us this lesson from the Hellenistic world. The vitality of the educational enterprise as depicted in the writings of the pedagogical century gave way in subsequent centuries to a formalized, desiccated approach to the study of both philosophy and rhetoric.

In the case of philosophy, the Neoplatanists narrowed their interests primarily to cosmology, eschewing contemporary issues. More and more they isolated themselves from the main stream of society. With near complete acceptance of the works of Plato and Aristotle as authoritative, inquiry among philosophers became mere pedantry and imitation.

Rhetoric, originally a dynamic method of logical reasoning and expression, gave way to oratory -- the memorization of set speeches and composition rules. The creativity and improvisation of the earlier centuries disappeared; debate relied less on critical thinking and more on authority and the mode of presentation.

Much that the Report criticizes in the college curriculum flows from the ossification of the curriculum in its present state. The 19th century infusion of German

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scholarship and the disciplinary approach spawned a period of exploration and vitality in American colleges. This now has devolved into factualism and the transmission of answers to students, sorely in need of learning how to derive solutions for themselves.

Seven. SUCCESSFUL ACQUISITION OF WISDOM (ARETE) COMES THROUGH EVOCATIVE STYLES OF TEACHING.

For the Hellenes, who considered education primarily the process of learning how to think and choose widely, instruction was an open ended, lively process. Both mentor and disciple contributed to the dialogue in the search for Truth. In the Socratic method, the search for virtue assumed that neither party was sure just where the discussion would end. It had an evanescent quality about it--the proces could never be recaptured or duplicated.

While the discussion method is common in classrooms today, it usually assumes that the instructor knows the correct answer and merely leads students to it through a process of elimination. Such an approach would not be considered truly Socratic and, indeed, depicts one of the unethical practices that the rhetoricians accused the philosophers of perpetuating.

Even the process of rhetoric in the Hellenic period was evocative, allowing the student an opportunity to derive his

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own answers. In the Athenian world didactic modes of instruction, along with drill, were relegated to the teaching of children in such subjects as counting, grammar, and reading.

An Athenian might judge the Report somewhat remiss in not underscoring the causes for the lack of effective teaching in present day colleges. They would criticize it for not recommending those methods more likely to induce critical thinking, so clear in the minds of Plato who advocated dialectic and Isocrates who championed rhetoric.

The Report treads lightly with regard to the pervasive use of lecturing on the American campus. Nor does it mention, much less promote, evocative modes of instruction as an effective means of stimulating critical thinking. It suggests that doctoral students experience class instruction under the guidance of their professors. But how many times have we heard, "I teach the way I was taught -- I read from my notes and they listen and take their notes." Students in our system memorize answers; they make use of resources not critical thinking.

In these brief comments I focused primarily on helpful lessons from the Hellenic and Hellenistic world and not on the negative aspects which have taught us a different lesson. Particularly I did not deal with its obvious

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sexism, racism, and elitism. It distrusted science and rejected vocational training. We have learned those lessons for ourselves and, hopefully, have overcome them in large part.

I am not sure that I would have the audacity in writing to future committees undertaking an examination of the college curriculum at either the institutional or national levels to recommend that they first reacquaint themselves with educational literature from the pedagogical century. But if I did, I would include in my list of "musts" the works of Plato -- "Protagorous," Georgas", and "Meno." And by Isocrates, "Against the Sophists" and the "Antidosis." It impresses me that such a reading list would offer as much insight into the dilemmas of curriculum and our present defective educational offerings as any other list that comes to mind. Not surprisingly to those of us with an historical bent, the debates that raged during that century in ancient Athens still persist, and we, as yet, have not reached a proper balance between theory and practice, humanities and sciences, much less the most effective method of instruction.

May I offer one last bit of wisdom from that era? To the question, Who is educated, Isocrates responded thus:

"This is my definition of the educated man. First, he is capable of dealing with the ordinary events of life, by possessing a happy sense of fitness and a faculty of usually hitting upon the right course of action. Secondly, his behavior in any society is always correct and proper. If he is thrown with offensive or disagreable company, he can meet it with easy good temper, and he treats every one with the utmost fairness and gentleness. Thirdly, he always has the mastery over his pleasures, and does not give way unduly under misfortune and pain, but behaves in such cases with manliness and worthily of the nature which has been given to us. Fourthly, (the most important point) he is not spoiled or puffed up nor is his head turned by success, but he continues througout to behave like a wise man, taking less pleasure in the good things which chance has given him at birth than in the products of his own talents and intelligence. Those whose soul is well tuned to play its part in all these ways, those I call wise and perfect men, and declare to possess all the virtues; those I regard as truly educated." (Parathenacaicus,30-32)

Now there's a statement around which one can rally. If more of that spirit had imbued the deliberations of the AAC Committee, I would have derived much greater satisfiaction from its report--"Integrity in the College Curriculum."

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